Small Group Work

How the Right Wing Finally Went Too Far

Everything You Need to Know About Obama’s Jobs Bill

Diane Ravitch and Her Fear for Higher Ed

The Scandalous Cost of Textbooks
Obama’s Jobs Bill includes $5 billion for public two-year colleges.

FIVE BILLION DOLLARS could go a long way to improving facilities at public colleges with two-year degree programs—just ask Gadsden State Community College instructor Derrick Griffey, who says, “We’re sitting in buildings...that are simply inadequate for the demands of the future.” (See more responses to the jobs bill on page 14 of The Advocate.) How can these faculty members, responsible for creating the workforce of tomorrow, do it in yesterday’s facilities? The $447 billion bill also includes funds to put back to work 280,000 K-12 teachers, laid off because of budget shortfalls and state cuts. To learn more, and also to tell Congress to support the President’s Jobs for America Act, visit www.educationvotes.org.

What is the value of an open door? Thought & Action asks for answers.

NEA’S HIGHER EDUCATION JOURNAL, Thought & Action, a peer-reviewed journal of higher education with a readership of more than 150,000, invites submissions on “The Value of an Open Door,” a special focus section of the 2012 issue. We encourage responses to the current attacks on public institutions of higher education, and such manifestations of attack as slashed state budgets, rising student tuition and fees, and cut programs. Consider this question: Are we fulfilling the nation’s implicit promise to deliver a high-quality higher education to all who qualify, regardless of race, gender, or income? Is the DREAM Act an answer? Is the G.I. Bill working? Can online education open doors or close them? Is the abolition of affirmative action admission policies a fait accompli? Consider also the relationship between instructor and student. How does technology factor in? Is shared governance an open door? For the first time, the review panel also asks for answers.

Mark your Calendar!

THE NEA’S 30TH ANNUAL HIGHER EDUCATION CONFERENCE will be held March 2-4 in Chicago. The theme, “Defining Our Values, Affirming Our Ideas,” will provide for sessions on organizing and bargaining, as well as higher-education policy, and be inclusive of full-time and part-time faculty, staff, and support personnel. For more information, visit www.nea.org/he.
When right-wing activists in Ohio, Wisconsin, Florida, and elsewhere decided that 2011 would be the year the unions died, they probably figured it would be an easy kill. Newly elected Republican governors, funded by recklessly wealthy contributors, had been matched with extremist state lawmakers. Little stood in their way, it seemed — except for a rising tide of regular people, who these past few months have reached out across America to stand together. With recall elections in Wisconsin, a major ballot initiative in Ohio, and energetic organizing efforts in Florida, they’re saying: “Stop right there!”
neering on doors in his Columbus, Ohio, neighborhood, Darrell Minor didn’t necessarily expect many new petition signatures to take to the state Capitol in the fight to save unions. “But I was pleased, surprised even, at the amount of support,” said Minor, a professor of mathematics at Columbus State Community College. “I mean we’re talking about one of the most ‘red’ counties in the state and I found people saying, “I’m a Republican, but this is crazy.’”

The insanity in Ohio kicked off this past spring with the approval of Senate Bill 5, a bill designed by newly elected Gov. John Kasich to destroy public-sector collective bargaining. Despite bipartisan opposition, the measure passed the Senate on a 17-16 vote, even as teachers and firefighters shouted “Shame on you!” from Capitol galleries. (The bill, which was signed into law by Kasich, is currently on hold.)

Meanwhile, in Wisconsin, where Gov. Scott Walker’s campaign enjoyed the financial support of the billionaire Koch brothers and their front organization, Americans for Prosperity, a budget-repair bill has eviscerated collective bargaining rights. Fourteen brave state Senators left the state to prevent its passage, but eventually were out-maneuvered by Republicans who met in the dark of night, in a near-empty Capitol to ram it past public opposition.

“Its legality is dubious. Its intent is mean spirited. It is perhaps the most grievous example of how democratic decision-making should not take place. The governor and his legislative minions should be ashamed of what they’ve done,” said NEA President Dennis Van Roekel.

And, of course, it isn’t just Ohio and Wisconsin, although their example has become the rallying cry of a movement to protect the middle class. It’s Florida. It’s Arizona. It’s New Jersey. It’s Rhode Island.

In Alabama, where lawmakers passed a measure making it more difficult for educators to join the Alabama Education Association, a Republican legislator defected to the Democratic Party this summer, saying, “I realized that I was for the working class people. I was for the poor, the middle class, just your average person... And when I got to Montgomery I realized that the Republican Party just wasn’t for that.”

**Fighting Back**

What does it mean for right-wing lawmakers that people are fed up with their blatant efforts to blame public employees for their own poor public policy? Just ask Randy Hopper and Dan Kapanke.

Hopper and Kapanke were among the union-busting senators who forced through the Wisconsin law that makes it illegal for public-employee unions to collectively bargain around working conditions, health care, pension benefits, or any other issue but cost-of-living raises.

In August, their constituents effectively told them, “You’ve gone too far,” and voted decisively to recall the pair from state office. It was an “impressive response to the governor’s arrogant overreach,” said the New York Times.

More than 12,000 volunteers, including higher-education faculty and employees, knocked on more than 92,000 doors in the recall efforts. In some places, voter turnout rivaled numbers seen in the 2008 presidential election. “[The turnout] across the state sends a loud wake-up call to the Wisconsin Legislature that the public is watching — and is concerned,” said Mary Bell, president of the Wisconsin Education Association Council.

Meanwhile, in Florida, you might wonder: Did newly elected Republican Gov. Rick Scott really mean to double the number of United Faculty of Florida members on some state university campuses? Surely that wasn’t his intent when he announced plans to outlaw paycheck deductions.
for union dues and eliminate collective bargaining for unions with fewer than 50 percent membership.

“While (Scott’s bills) did not pass, they convinced would-be members that public employees are under siege,” wrote University of Florida associate professor Paul Ortiz in LaborNotes. “It wasn’t just about bargaining on campus. It was about the bigger picture of state and national politics, budget cuts to education, and ongoing attacks on public sector workers—us!”

And it’s not just faculty or other public employees who have begun to see union membership in a different way. It’s also your neighbors. Embattled public employees and their unions have the support of most Americans as they fight the efforts of right-wing governors, according to a New York Times/CBS poll earlier this year.

By a measure of two to one, Americans oppose the current efforts to weaken the collective bargaining rights of public employees. Similarly, they opposed cutting the pay or benefits of public employees. In fact, a solid 61 percent, including a majority of Republicans, said the salary and benefits of public employees were “about right” or even “too low.” (Interestingly, the group that most approved of pay cuts for public employees was respondents earning more than $100,000 a year.)

The Buckeye State

In Ohio, educators face what the Chronicle of Higher Education has called “possibly the most anti-faculty labor law ever.” Unless voters overturn the measure at the polls on November 8, collective bargaining is finished for the state’s teachers, nurses, firefighters, police officers, and other public employees. Police officers won’t be able to negotiate for life-saving equipment. Faculty members won’t be able to speak for the classroom conditions that help students learn.

Specifically, the new law states that any faculty member who participates in “educational policies related to admission, curriculum, subject matter, and methods of instruction and research”—and what faculty member doesn’t select textbooks or decide how to present knowledge and skills—would be “management level employees.”

“Democrats, Independents, many Republicans...they’re offended by this,” said Andrew Feight, a Shawnee State University associate professor of history.

“Democrats, Independents, many Republicans...they’re offended by this,” said Andrew Feight, a Shawnee State University associate professor of history. “There is definitely the feeling of a movement afoot,” agreed Feight, who noted the particularly strong work done locally between his local campus union and the Shawnee Labor Council, AFL-CIO. This past spring, he and others joined more than 11,000 people, standing shoulder to shoulder at the Columbus state house, in a rally organized by “We Are Ohio.”

It was “an uplifting experience,” Feight noted, and it didn’t stop there. Now he and his colleagues are making sure voters understand that they have an opportunity on November 8 to speak up and stop the craziness.

BY MARY ELLEN FLANNERY
Editor, NEA Office of Higher Education mflannery@nea.org
Getting Students to Talk (and Think)

If we want to help students learn, we need to hear what they are thinking. Small group work can not only give students time to think (and change their minds!), it also lets us listen in.

When I talk with most instructors about their teaching, I identify six formats at their disposal: lecturing, large group discussions, small group work, labs, clinical rounds, and performance. The first three are the most commonly used, but while lectures and large group discussions are fairly well understood, few instructors have seen effective small group work in action. In this article, I’ll share a few of the many small group protocols.

Small group work done well can raise the energy level in a class, build student confidence, and allow more voices to be heard. It also gives students time to make changes in their thinking, which is important. By the time students get to college or university, they have formed beliefs and will defend them. To get good grades, they are willing to write down what we want on the exams—but that doesn’t mean we changed their minds. Small group work doesn’t necessarily change their minds either, but it does provide the chance to do so. It also gives us an opportunity to hear what they are thinking, which not only helps us find the gaps in their knowledge, but also can enrich the class and make visible the specialized knowledge that every new group of students brings to class.
Large Group Discussion is Over-Used

Large group discussion — where an instructor speaks with all the students at one time — is one of the most over-used and least effective teaching methods. Only a few students can speak in a large group discussion; the rest are often bored or distracted, not learning. The prepared students and the assertive students (even if they aren’t prepared) will talk, while the others listen, take notes and (if you give homework after the class), strategize about what material they really have to cover. When you tell students to write something down because it is important, you emphasize memorization rather than thought, and thereby discourage long-term learning. To make students more responsible for their learning, try using small group discussions.

Split the students into small groups of four to six people (two to three for a lecture hall). Give them a problem or a question to resolve, and give them about 10 minutes to work on it. In a classroom of 40 people, you can have 10 groups of four, and talk to one group while the others work.

Using Small Group Discussion Protocols

Students Who Talk in Class, Think in Class

The class that convinced me to use small group discussion protocols was an U.S. history survey at Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI) at Columbus, now a regional campus in its own right. It was an evening class, three hours long, that met once a week. Some of the students travelled for more than an hour to reach the class after a full day of work. My teaching style had previously been to lecture, occasionally successfully, and I knew there was no way we would get through a three-hour class that way. Luckily, I worked at Indiana University’s Teaching Resource Center (TRC) and had access to more than 20 years of articles and books on teaching. Drawing upon Frederick (1986), Bergquist & Phillips (1975), and the advice of the TRC Director, Joan Middendorf, I chose several small group discussion methods, including jigsaw discussions and role playing. During the semester, I invented the evidence-based debate protocol included here. I also incorporated Just-in-Time Teaching (JiTT, developed at IUPUI). The combination worked. The students remained active throughout the class, and were often surprised to discover that class was over. I always had at least one discussion protocol that we didn’t get to. The students all talked, knew each other’s names, trusted each other, and learned a lot. I’ve used small group work ever since, and it has always worked, even with classes that were initially apathetic and unresponsive.

Meet Dakin Burdick

Dakin Burdick is the Director of the Center for Teaching Excellence and Assistant Professor of History at Endicott College, Massachusetts. He currently serves on the Board of Directors of the Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education (POD), and has been their official historian for the last ten years. He has given more than 80 presentations on teaching and learning, and is the proud father of two wonderful kids who play French Horn and violin/fiddle respectively. All live in a 340-year-old house, whose neighbor is on permanent display in the National Museum of American History. He can be found at dakinburdick@yahoo.com.

TALES FROM REAL LIFE > KEEPING STUDENTS THINKING

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will have about eight people talking at any one time. That’s eight times the level of discussion! They will gain confidence and discover new viewpoints. At about 10 minutes, the buzz will die down (as they finish the problem) and then get even louder (as they start talking about their social lives). At that point, bring them together again, even if not all are finished. The group work has done its work by building energy and giving them a chance to think. Now have groups report out. Make them commit to a particular stance or understanding, so you can see their thinking and have a chance to clear up misconceptions or expand upon their understanding. Angelo & Cross (1993) is wonderful for this, as it has 50 different ways to get students to report out and even includes disciplinary examples.

**VARY THE DISCUSSION METHOD**

When instructors use small group work, they often use only the “round robin” protocol. Students get in a circle and talk. Since the students picked their own groups, there usually is a group full of “A” students and a group at the other end. And because they picked their friends, conversation will turn to their social life about five minutes faster than it would have with random groupings. If that’s all you do, expect your students to get bored. Instead, pick about four or five different discussion protocols to use in a particular semester. Here are four examples:

**CONCEPT TEST**
The “concept test” or “ConcepTest,” pioneered by Mazur (1997), can be used even in a lecture hall to ensure that students understand one concept before moving on to the next. First, check student understanding with a multiple-choice question. If most get it right, move on. If they are divided, have them turn to a neighbor and convince each other that they have the right answer. Then poll them again. Usually they will be more correct and you can move on. Occasionally, as with any small group work, they come back with the incorrect answer, and then you should step in to clear up misconceptions and give more examples.

**JIGSAW**
In a “jigsaw” protocol, each student studies a different aspect of the topic. In class, each student informs his group about the studied aspect, and together they build a more complete understanding. Each student adds a piece to the completed puzzle.

**TALKING-STICK**
In the “talking-stick” protocol, only one person can speak at a time. A token (usually a pen in my class) is passed and each person speaks for a minute regarding the topic under discussion. This protocol is great for ensuring that all voices are heard, not just the assertive folks. It also puts the unprepared students on the spot, and embarrasses them in front of their peers. That can encourage them to prepare more fully next time, but embarrassment also can be avoided by just letting them know you will be using this protocol and they should be ready to participate. Interestingly, this protocol proved very helpful for a student with Tourette syndrome, who could not stop himself from blurtling out—except when using the talking stick. If the linear nature of discussion that results from the talking-stick does not work for your content, try giving students three tokens each (playing cards, pennies, etc.) for the “expense account” protocol. Each time they speak, students put one of their chips in the middle of the table, and no one can retrieve them until everyone has used all their chips.

**EVIDENCE-BASED DEBATE**
This protocol adds a slight twist to the typical debate. The class is divided into an equal number of small groups. Those groups then count off, with the odd-numbered groups on the side arguing for the motion and the even-numbered groups arguing against the motion. The instructor tells the rules of the debate, which are:

- Each group gets to make one statement, and must support that statement with a page number in the text where the supporting evidence can be found.

**BEST PRACTICES > PUTTING THE PUZZLE TOGETHER**

Besides the regular “jigsaw,” there’s also a “double jigsaw,” which can cover even more content. It takes time to prepare, so I generally use it just once or twice a semester. In the first lesson of my U.S. history survey, which covers pre-Columbian history from the dawn of time to 1492, I sometimes use it to give students a deeper understanding of a very broad topic. I divide students into small groups and then hand out a different two to three-page reading to each student in that group. In one group, the students each read about a different archaeological find: Clovis Point, Spirit Cave Man, Kennewick Man, Cactus Hill, and Monte Verde. After reading the assignments, they teach the others in their group what they learned.

Other groups receive readings based around pre-

Columbian agriculture, wildlife, architecture, languages, and other topics. After the initial jigsaw, I tell the students that they are now the classroom authorities on their particular topic. I have them count off and create new groups composed of one “authority” from each field. These second jigsaw groups then teach each other what they have learned. In an online setting, this can be done with longer readings and a single huge jigsaw on the discussion forum. Either way, the students will have a better appreciation for the depth of the subject.
ISSUES TO CONSIDER

COACHING SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Make sure they prepare, keep them busy, and make their thinking visible.

HOW DO I KEEP STUDENTS TO PREPARE FOR CLASS?

Grade them. How many people do you know willingly work for free? Well, grades are the coin of the realm in academia, so assign points with that in mind. As Ramsden (1992) said, “From our students’ point of view, the assessment always defines the actual curriculum.” Reward them for doing the sort of preparation you want them to do. Don’t just dump a bunch of points on the midterm and final, because you will be sending the message that only the tests are important. Students will skip on their class preparation and cram just before the tests. Use frequent assessment, but keep your weekly grading load low by grading each student’s work in about a minute and giving only group feedback (for the most part). Save your detailed individual feedback for the most important student work.

HOW DO I KEEP THEM FROM TEXTING IN CLASS?

Keep them busy. Small group is great for that. If they have laptops, either have them close the laptops or use them in the group work. For example, you could have them conduct online research in class as part of the discussion. And be sure you understand how to use the latest technology, even if you do not use it yourself.

HOW DO I KEEP THEM ON TOPIC?

Wander through the room. If they are off-topic, let them work, but if they are off-topic, bring them back. Assign them randomly to groups every day by having them count off, by first initial of last name, by birthday, etc. They will stay on topic longer, and the class will become a stronger community as everyone gets to know and trust everyone else.

HOW DO I CLEAR UP MISCONCEPTIONS?

First you have to hear what they think. Use Just-In-Time Teaching and grade their preparation for class before class, and then customize the class accordingly. In class, be sure that different people report out every time. Respect their opinions and value their responses, but make sure you let them know when they are wrong. Give three pieces of positive feedback for every negative one.

WHAT IF THEY STILL WON’T TALK?

Let them know that you care about your success. Tell them that. Call them by name. Make a personal connection. Phrase each question three different ways, but all at the same level of Bloom’s Taxonomy. And count to ten in your head anytime you ask a question. Give them time to think of an answer.

REFERENCES & RESOURCES


Malof, J. (2004). Using the Jigsaw Method of Cooperative Learning to Teach from Primary Sources. Inventio: Creative Thinking about Learning and Teaching. 6(1).


Inventio: Creative Thinking about Learning and Teaching. A journal published by the American Biology Teacher Association.
WHY I’M A MEMBER

ON THE ROAD

Crossing the border,
Finding common ground

Recently I joined NEA’s National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) President Jim Rice in Montreal to meet with our Education International (EI) counterparts from Quebec and other provinces. Leaders and staff from unions representing tenured and contingent faculty as well as education support professionals participate in our “North American Higher Education” group.

We meet semi-annually to forge cross-border ties and share information on trends and union strategies. We discuss the work and impact of international agencies like OECD on higher education, and we promote more coordinated higher education advocacy from our region to Education International (EI), a worldwide federation of public sector education unions. NEA President Dennis Van Roekel is the newly elected vice president for the North America and Caribbean region. (See www.ei-ie.org and World Congress news, including the new “Policy Paper on Education.”)

We talked about our state fights to save collective bargaining rights and the impact on higher education employees. Funding cuts, erosion of tenure, and increased privatization are continuing threats in both countries. David Robinson, associate executive director of the Canadian Association of University Teachers, reported that provinces are planning austerity measures, and Canadian officials are looking to Wisconsin and other states.

Quebec contingent faculty union (FNEEQ) officers Jean Trudelle, Caroline Senneville, and Marie Blais informed us about the student/faculty union collaboration to fight the doubling of university tuition in Quebec as well as their extensive union outreach campaign. Protests against tuition hikes are planned for November 10th.

Elizabeth Russell
DIRECTOR OF ADMISSIONS
EASTERN MAINE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Once a month, Elizabeth Russell, accompanied by every dues-paying colleague in her association of professional staff, sits down with the college president for a little frank conversation. These discussions, formally known as “labor management group meetings,” and required by contract, can range widely on issues of concern. For example, why have contracted employees supplanted some full-time positions? “We addressed that issue and an appropriate resolution, including the hiring of additional full-time staff, was identified,” says Russell.

You might hear union members talk about “having a voice at the table,” and this is exactly what it means. Through membership, Russell has a voice, literally, in the president’s office. “We try to work with management to find solutions. But if I weren’t part of the association, I wouldn’t have the opportunity to be part of that solution,” she said. “I appreciate having a voice to ensure that everybody in our group is treated fairly.”

Russell, who is Eastern Maine’s campus representative to the statewide Community College Administrators Association, also appreciates the professional development opportunities that have come her way through the association. NEA’s Emerging Leaders Academy, which she graduated in 2009, provided new leadership skills, plus a chance to interact with educators from around the country, faculty and staff alike. “How many other associations include everybody who can influence a young person’s life?”

BY VALERIE WILK
Organizational specialist, NEA
Office of Higher Education
Is the U.S. Falling Behind?

THE UNITED STATES, once the global leader in production of a most singular resource—its talent pool of college graduates—is losing ground to emerging nations. The recent “Education at a Glance,” an annual report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), found that about 40 percent of Americans under 35 had earned a college degree in 2009. If that number sounds familiar, it’s because it hasn’t changed in decades. Meanwhile, young people in countries like Korea are flocking to campuses. These days, a rate of 40 percent means the U.S. ranks 12th out of 36 countries ranked by OECD.

Percentage of population that has attained tertiary education, by age group (2009)

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Public expenditure on higher education, as a percentage of a country’s total public expenditures.

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IN SHEER DOLLARS spent on education, the U.S. still leads the world—but it falls to the middle when you consider its investment in public higher education in terms of its total public spending. And it doesn’t necessarily spend that money smartly. Most goes to student financial aid because tuition is so astronomically high here. By contrast, in countries where almost all universities are public and far less costly to attend, governments need not underwrite the price of tuition or the cost of that fancy cafeteria. Subsidizing college means paying for educational services. “In Canada, we laugh when we hear that the college football coach earns more than the entire philosophy department,” said David Robinson, associate executive director of the Canadian Association of University Teachers.

BY COMPARISON, 35 PERCENT OF ENGINEERING DEGREES WENT TO WOMEN IN ICELAND, 34 PERCENT IN SPAIN, AND JUST 11 PERCENT IN JAPAN.
Let Your Voice Be Heard

A Q&A with Diane Ravitch

Q: A couple of years ago, Thought & Action published an essay called “The Tangled Web of Standardized Test Culture,” in which the author, an English professor, wrote that “students who have swallowed the standardized Kool-Aid test cannot decipher what information is important or synthesize that information into a meaningful statement.” What happens to students when they strive to master the multiple-choice test?

A: I have been thinking recently about how 12 consecutive years of multiple-choice, standardized tests affects children’s brains. I wonder what it does to them when they are repeatedly asked to address a question that can be answered by checking one of four boxes. Of course, they know that two of the answers will be very wrong, and then they can guess between the remaining two. But what happens to their ability to think when they are never asked to consider the validity of the question? What if the question is not the right question? Is there a different way to elicit a better response? What if there are two right answers? Does this format over time teach students to think inside the box, quite literally? Does it punish divergent thinking? Does it squash creativity and originality? ... The tests should be an indicator, but they seem to have turned into mental straight jackets.

Q: Many faculty worry that the worst of K-12 education reform, like high-stakes testing and arbitrary data goals, will creep onto their campuses. In Texas, the presidential candidate, Gov. Rick Perry has called for “outcomes-based funding” that would reward state universities for graduating more students. To reach the 2015 goal, the state needs to produce 46,000 more degrees each year. Is this a good strategy to create a better-educated citizenry?

A: Good grief, no, this is No Child Left Behind (NCLB) thinking transplanted to higher education. This is the pursuit of numbers for the sake of meeting a quota, not for the sake of learning. We can graduate all students if we lower standards enough. If numbers are our goal, we can give every student a college degree and not subject them to the trouble (and expense) of going to classes. In fact, with the rapid spread of online “learning,” that seems to be the wave of the future. Students can sit at home in their pajamas, submit essays, answer questions, and no one will know who wrote the essays or answered the questions.

Q: In this issue of Thought & Action, retired CSU Sacramento professor, Jeff Lustig, writes that “those who promote a business model of higher education” would ultimately destroy what’s good about the university: accessibility; academic freedom; shared governance; liberal arts; and a sense of shared community... What else would you add?

A: Well, I would add a couple of important things. I think we would lose the very essence of education, the inquiry and intellectual engagement that is the heart of learning, because they can’t be measured and therefore don’t matter. The business model has been harmful to K-12 education and it will be harmful to the life of the university as well, because it operates by carrots and sticks, by rewards and sanctions. The business model is incompatible with the life of the mind.

Q: Anything else to tell our readers?

A: Use all the tools of our democracy to defend your profession, your students, access to education, and the quality of education. Do not despair. Do not give up. Stand up for what you believe and let your voice be heard.
The State of Higher Ed

California

Informational pickets have been planned for California State University campuses during the first week of November, while a one-day strike may be held Nov. 17, in response to the administration’s refusal to pay previously negotiated faculty salary raises. (Two fact-finders in a row have rejected the Chancellor’s "there is no money" defense.) Ongoing contract negotiations have made it clear to members of the California Faculty Association that administrators only want to take things away, including the faculty’s authority over its own work.

Illinois

On Day 462 without a contract, the fourth union at Southern Illinois University Carbondale voted to authorize a strike. Read more in the interview below.

Michigan

At Central Michigan University, full-time faculty await the results of a “fact-finding” by a Michigan Economic Relations Commission appointee. They currently are working without a contract and held a one-day work stoppage in August. Learn more at www.cmufacc.org.

Missouri

Missouri NEA associations have been reclaiming their collective bargaining rights, which were restored in 2007 by the state Supreme Court. In September, the MNEA Board of Directors voted to affiliate the Missouri State University Faculty Association, and now faculty members are enthusiastically signing on. Soon they’ll be bringing their issues to the university’s governing board to be heard!

Nebraska

Who’s the most effective organizer on your campus? At a fall All-Member Luncheon at the University of Nebraska Kearney, five NSEA members brought five colleagues, who they had been “mentoring” into the union. Each signed up that day! The convincing issues included: the master negotiated contract; the union’s voice in state and national politics; and the fear that Wisconsin-style anti-faculty laws are crossing state borders...

Oregon

Two years ago, Klamath Community College faculty got a chilling letter from administrators, stating no job would be safe during budget cuts. Today, they have a union, which ratified its first contract this fall, and offers real protection during these uncertain economic times. The contract includes provisions for equitable layoffs; a grievance process; and even the guarantee of email addresses for adjunct faculty. (Can you imagine trying to keep in contact with students without email?) “We tried very hard to keep in mind how we could serve students better,” said Mary Lou Wogan, a mathematics professor and member of the bargaining team.

U.S.

Have you taken a look at NEA’s recently updated College and University Data Analysis System (CUDAS)? This is an easy-to-use, online database that provides multi-year data to questions on faculty pay, staff numbers, enrollment, tuition, degrees awarded, and more. Go to cudas.nea.org.

Two-Minute Interview > Randy Hughes

RANDY HUGHES is the president of the SIUC Faculty Association/IEA, one of four unions at Southern Illinois University Carbondale that recently voted to authorize a strike. Their unified action sends a clear signal that, after more than 15 months without a contract, it’s past time for administrators to get serious about bargaining a fair contract.

What pushed you to the point of a strike vote?

After a year of failing to engage in real negotiations over the issues, the administration unilaterally imposed furlough days and draconian reduction-in-force language on faculty and civil service employees. For graduate assistants, it was the outright rejection of any relief for mounting fees and inadequate health care coverage. We were left with no choice.

What common issues have bound the four unions?

We share an interest in preserving the rights and protections that a contract provides. That’s not only protection of the individual against arbitrary and capricious actions by the administration, but also the right to have a say in what happens at the university and to look after the long-term interests of faculty, staff, and students to protect the quality of education, the image of the university, and the value of its degrees.

What gives you confidence as you look ahead?

I gain confidence from the many individuals who have recognized the value that collective bargaining brings to our campus and are looking forward to what we can gain for the long term. The evidence of this is the overwhelming support for action we received in the strike authorization votes.

What would you want students to know about this strike vote?

What is in these contracts will make a difference for the quality of students’ education and the value of their degrees for the long term. The contract helps us retain faculty, and it also includes a clause about student-to-faculty ratios. There is a new push to distance education, but we want to make sure those numbers are included in the ratios—and that faculty have control over the quality of those programs. Students know their fees are increasing at an alarming rate, but they’ve been mainly going toward things like the new expensive football stadium.
The American Jobs Act: How could it help you and your students?

The President’s $450 billion American Jobs Act includes $5 billion for modernizations at colleges with two-year degree programs, as well as $30 billion to put back to work as many as 280,000 K12 teachers who have been laid off because of state budget shortfalls and cuts. How could that modernization money be used at your campus? What would it mean to restore the K12 teachers who work with your future students?

KIRSTEN: I teach at a two-year college, and I have heard of situations where students can’t use the latest software in their fields (e.g. software for drafting and architectural design) because the computers are too old to run the new software. Perhaps some of this money could go towards ensuring our students graduate with the current skills they need to enter the workforce, rather than skills that are already outdated by the time they receive their diplomas!

HEATHER: I teach at a four-year college, which also contains a two-year College of Technology. Our four-year college is well-known for its programs in engineering. I’d like to see monies targeted toward training students to work in renewable energy technologies. We’ve already got a good base in traditional technical trades; we just need the financial incentive to develop alternative programs. If government money were offered in support of these renewable energy/alternative energy trade programs, they might have a fighting chance of surviving here. Right now, most of our curriculum is funded by the coal and oil industries.

DERICK: I teach at a community college in Alabama. For us, I definitely think that “modernization” is the key word. Like many community colleges across the United States, we’re sitting in buildings that were constructed in the 50’s and 60’s (or even older in some cases) that are simply inadequate for the demands of the future. Not only are these buildings antiquated with regard to instructional technology, they’re also outdated when it comes to environmental systems, water connections, and overall energy efficiency. I would really like to see some of that money used to construct newer facilities that will finally put much of the college into the 21st century.

In addition to the improvements in infrastructure, I would like to see the recruitment of new faculty and the expansion of workforce development programs. We find ourselves teaching more with less. In my department alone, some of our subject areas are being taught primarily by adjunct instructors. With regard to workforce development, a high school diploma alone is not enough to meet the needs of today’s high tech industries. In many two-year technical programs, students are employable as soon as they graduate. For example, the three major car manufacturers here in Alabama use a high level of robotics, computer technology, and industrial engineering technology. Many of our students can be prepared by our two-year programs to exceed the expectations of these high level manufacturers. Of course, harking back to an earlier statement, in order to create these superior workforce development programs, facilities and infrastructure are going to be a key piece of the puzzle. You can’t prepare students for 21st century if you’re still teaching with 20th century technology and buildings.

To address the second aspect of your question, more K-12 teachers are crucial for the success of institutions of higher learning. Right now, we’re seeing high levels of both math and reading remediation in our state colleges and universities. In my county alone, 26 percent of high school graduates entering our state two and four-year institutions must take remedial math. With additional K-12 teachers, hopefully we could improve this achievement gap so that students will be prepared to complete college level work on the first day of class.

This conversation started on an online discussion board at http://public-groups.nea.org/discussion/topic/show/511572. Please visit and let us know how the American Jobs Bill could help your campus and students!
Supreme Decisions

What’s ahead for the highest court?

BY JASON WALTA

AS IT DOES EVERY YEAR the Supreme Court commenced its new term on the first Monday in October. In previous years, its docket has included such blockbuster rulings as Citizens United v. FEC (2010), the campaign-finance decision that unleashed a torrent of corporate money into federal and state elections. Although the current term will include several cases of interest to higher-education faculty, it doesn’t have a landmark case that could change the nation’s legal landscape—at least, not yet.

Some of the cases on tap undoubtedly have implications for the employment rights of higher-ed faculty. For example, in its first week, the Court heard Hosanna-Tabor Church v. EEOC, a case that will affect faculty at religiously-affiliated schools. There, the Court will examine the so-called “ministerial exception”—a judicially-crafted rule that exempts employees who perform certain religious functions at religious organizations from most federal employment discrimination laws. The Court will decide whether this unwritten exemption defeats a claim under the Americans with Disabilities Act by a teacher at a religious elementary school who taught a full secular curriculum, but also had some religious instructional duties.

Faculty at public universities will be affected by another case to be heard, Coleman v. Maryland Court of Appeals, in which the Court will consider the federal government’s ability to authorize lawsuits against state employers for certain violations of the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). In a raft of decisions during the past two decades, the Court had steadily eroded state employees’ rights to sue their employers, reasoning that such suits are barred by the ancient doctrine of “sovereign immunity.” Although the Court briefly bucked that trend in a case allowing state employees to sue under FMLA for a denial of sick leave during a family medical emergency, the Court now seems poised to bar FMLA suits against state employers for denying sick leave for an employee’s own medical emergency.

Another case of particular note to faculty will be Golan v. Holder, which involves Congress’s authority to enact copyright protections. In that case, a group of educators, musicians, film archivists, and motion picture distributors have challenged a 1994 “copyright restoration” law that took certain works that had been in the public domain for years—including Prokofiev’s Peter and the Wolf—and restored their copyright protection. As a result, anyone seeking to perform or distribute the work now must locate the copyright holder, obtain permission, and perhaps even pay royalties. The plaintiffs have challenged Congress’s constitutional authority to remove works from the public domain and argue that the 1994 law infringes the free-speech rights of those who, before the law was passed, freely performed or distributed works that had entered the public domain.

As I mentioned, the Supreme Court’s 2011 term does not yet have a blockbuster case on par with Citizens United. But that is likely to change—and soon. Recently, the Obama Justice Department elected to take a lower-court decision striking down part of the healthcare-reform law, the Affordable Care Act, to the Supreme Court. This decision from the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals conflicts with decisions from two other Federal Circuit Courts. As a result, the Supreme Court is all but certain to take the case in order to resolve the conflict.

And when the case arrives at the Court, the battles lines will be drawn for perhaps the most significant and defining decision on the constitutional authority of the federal government in more than 70 years. I will take up that issue in my next column.
The Scandalous Cost of Textbooks

THE COST OF COLLEGE TEXTBOOKS is a major scandal of our time, a stumbling block that thwarts the legitimate aspirations of our students, especially those from less affluent families.

After tuition and living expenses, textbooks typically constitute the largest cost of a college education. Textbook prices have risen at twice the annual inflation rate for more than 20 years. At two-year public colleges, textbooks often cost as much as all other fees and tuition combined. The campus store at my university estimates textbook costs for full-time students at $500 per semester. In part because of high costs, many students do not purchase assigned texts and do not do the required reading.

Most successful textbooks by major publishers are revised every three years or so to reduce the market for used books. Publishers do not make any money from the resale and recycling of their books, so they want the books removed from the market as soon as possible.

The high cost of college textbooks is encouraged by the ways the books are marketed. Most college students buy their texts at the campus store, where already-outrageous list prices are routinely boosted by a few dollars more. As colleges and universities face shrinking funding, the campus store increasingly is seen by administrators as a “profit center” rather than a resource for students. Meanwhile, most major textbook publishers provide free “examination copies” for professors who will consider them for course adoption. This practice drives up book costs for students, even more so when unethical professors order books simply to sell to used book brokers for pocket money.

One helpful check on textbook costs would result if more professors would take responsibility for knowing the prices of assigned texts—and commit to keeping the cost of course materials under a certain amount.

Professors can reduce textbook costs for students without reducing the number of pages students read (1) by assigning an earlier edition of a textbook, (2) by teaching from three or four short paperback books, and (3) by constructing customized course readers. Whatever the format, students learn best when they mark and review their own copies of a text.

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